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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that children possess four important personality characteristics and abilities which define them as resilient. These characteristics and abilities are social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future. In addition, several qualities of the environment of resilient youth tend to predict positive life outcomes for such youth. These qualities include a caring and supportive relationship with another person, high family and community expectations for the youth's behavior, and opportunities to participate in meaningful activities. Drawing on a consideration of these environmental factors, this paper explores the potential link between efforts at drug abuse prevention and the creative arts which might contribute to the development of new prevention strategies to build and enhance resiliency among youth at high risk for substance abuse. For many years the creative arts have been utilized as a therapeutic and rehabilitative medium with very diverse population groups. Creative arts strategies and activities, particularly in the area of the performance arts, have been employed with a variety of groups, but especially with groups with special needs. It is proposed that artists and individuals working in substance abuse prevention work in collaboration to build resiliency among vulnerable youth in order to prevent alcohol and other drug abuse. (Contains 12 references.) (PAM)

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BUI[illegible]DING RESILIENCY IN YOUTH:

[illegible]IMAGINE THE DIFFERENCE

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BUILDING RESILIENCY IN YOUTH: IMAGINE THE DIFFERENCE

Resilience also resiliency, n.
1. The ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune; buoyancy. 2. The property of a material that enables it to resume its original shape or position after being bent, stretched, or compressed; elasticity.

The Preventionist's Perspective of Resiliency

The resilient child is one who "works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well."

- from Bonnie Benard

The Artist's Perspective of Resiliency

"In the moment of artistic creation you are whole and sane."

- Robert A. Alexander

The Bridge

The creative collaboration of preventionists and artists to build resiliency among vulnerable youth in order to prevent alcohol and other drug abuse.

Resiliency - What It Is.

The results of more than 30 years of prospective research in child development, from investigators studying risk factors related to the development of certain types of disorders, have taught us that children possess four important personality characteristics and abilities which define them as resilient. These characteristics and abilities are identified as social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future (Benard, 1992). According to research findings, resilient children are better able than non-resilient children to establish positive relationships with others. Resilient children possess the ability to effectively negotiate within a chaotic and negative environment. Resilient youth possess a strong sense of independence which enables them to see themselves as separate and apart from their

dysfunctional environments, and they possess the sense that they can exert some control over what happens to them. These characteristics of resiliency have consistently been identified in the literature to be associated with positive outcomes for youth whose dysfunctional and adverse life circumstances would suggest otherwise.

Benard (1992) has also identified three qualities of the environments of resilient youth which tend to predict positive outcomes for such youth. These qualities include caring and supportive relationships with significant persons in their lives. Based on an extensive review of the prevention research literature, Benard found that, despite the negative life circumstances in which at risk children were involved, many of the children described as resilient had established a caring and supportive relationship with at least one person who provided a stable and consistent source of positive affirmation. A second quality of the environment of resilient youth includes high expectations that are held for the youth. An environment, either the family or the community, that holds and consistently communicates high expectations for the behavior of youth also contributes to the development of resiliency in the youth. Finally, resilient youth have opportunities to participate and become actively involved in meaningful activities in their environment. When youth are expected to achieve within and according to the established rules and standards of their environment, they are more likely to develop resiliency.

Given these characteristics of resilient children and of the

putative environmental factors that contribute to their resiliency, there may, perhaps, be a natural linkage between the disciplines of drug abuse prevention and the creative arts which might contribute to the development of new prevention strategies to build and enhance resiliency among youth at high risk for substance abuse. The discussion which follows in this paper is an attempt to clarify that linkage, through the establishment of a language that is common to preventionists and artists alike, and to provide the rationale for the development of a creative partnership between artists and experts in alcohol and drug abuse (AODA) prevention.

The Prevention Perspective on Resiliency.

The concept of resiliency has only recently come into popular usage in the lexicon of alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) prevention professionals who work with children and youth. In the context of prevention, resiliency is identified as a combination of behavioral, psychological, social and emotional factors which enable youth to withstand the pressures of their life circumstances. For some youth, adverse life circumstances may be relatively benign and have only a minor negative impact on them. However, for many others, such life circumstances may exert an extraordinary influence and place the youth at high risk for a variety of problems, including alcohol and other drug abuse. Thus, in effect, resiliency in AODA prevention represents the degree to which youth can recover from or adjust to the stresses of negative life circumstances without succumbing to the permanent and/or debilitating consequences of drug abuse.

When the goal of the work of prevention professionals, in targeting their efforts and programmatic activities to high-risk youth, is to strengthen the resiliency of youth to eschew involvement with alcohol and other drugs, this goal is often achieved through a variety of "alternative activities." Such alternative activities are prevention strategies that are designed to provide long-term opportunities to actively engage and involve youth in positive, resiliency-enhancing experiences. In fact, alternative activities are believed to serve some of the same functions as drug use by providing excitement, challenge and relief from boredom. But such activities, unlike drug use, also provide opportunities for personal growth. It is through the active, hands-on involvement of youth in such alternative activities that the activities have their greatest preventive impact.

The Artistic Perspective on Resiliency.

For many years the creative arts have been utilized as a therapeutic and rehabilitative medium with very diverse population groups. Creative arts strategies and activities, particularly in the area of the performance arts (i.e., drama and dance), have been employed with a variety of groups, but especially with groups with special needs (Blumberg, 1976; Kobak, 1977; Shaw & Stevens, 1979; Shaw, 1981; Rainwater, 1982; Marschark & West, 1983; Snyder-Greco, 1983; McCaslin, 1984 and Goodwin, 1985). For example, Blumberg (1976) effectively used creative dramatics to increase social competence with children and adults who have mental retardation. In a 1985 study of the efficacy of creative drama as a method for

teaching social skills to persons with mental retardation, Goodwin found that improvisational drama had positive effects on the participant's development of social skills.

Before they begin school, and even in the primary grades, children depend on play, movement, song, dramatic play and artistic expressive activity as their means of making sense of their world. However, that these pastimes gradually give way, in both form and substance, to activities that blunt and dull the spirit is more a testament to the power of oppressive social forces and to the often chaotic environments in which children live than it is a statement of the natural process of expressive maturation. Thus, the role of creative expression in prevention is to strengthen the resiliency of youth in order that they do not succumb to the assaults of their environment. In more recent work by artists, the hands-on use of creative arts has come to play a vital role for enhancing the development of resiliency among high risk youth.

In the panoply of resources that are available to help youth develop resiliency, the creative arts are an exceptionally important ingredient. But, while the use of creative arts techniques by professional artists working with youth can be used to strengthen the resiliency of the youth, the artists may not necessarily define their work in such terms, and they may not even regard their work as prevention. However, in the area of prevention, artists and substance abuse experts may, perhaps, be more alike than they are different. In fact, in the long-term, hands-on involvement of these two very different groups of

professionals with youth, many of the same ideals are shared for enhancing resiliency in youth at risk.

The Bridge: Artists and Preventionists in Partnership.

Any efforts in substance abuse prevention, especially those that are undertaken to build and strengthen resiliency among vulnerable youth, will be neither the sole nor even the primary responsibility of prevention specialists. Efforts that may be undertaken to achieve AODA prevention among youth will require the cooperation and collaboration of many different kinds of individuals and groups working most effectively in partnership with one another. Artists and preventionists working in creative collaboration can provide such an effective partnership. However, in order to be maximally effective, both partners must be willing to make a commitment to the effort, they must be willing to establish and nurture a hands-on relationship with the youth, and they must be willing to take risks.

Commitment in prevention requires more than just a "one-shot" encounter with youth. Rather, it requires a consistent and on-going effort to engage youth in the creative process. In addition to what artists are already contributing to the prevention effort by way of creative performances and/or products **for** youth, there is even more of a critical need to explore the possibilities for hands-on creative arts work **with** youth. In much the same way that preventionists commit to involving youth in alternative prevention projects and activities, artists of every genre and medium must also commit to engaging and to creating **with** youth opportunities to

develop and to grow; opportunities to enhance resiliency.

Through the hands-on involvement of artists with youth comes the possibility for the development of prevention-based relationships that are both nurturing and resiliency-enhancing. When artists are able to develop these kinds of relationships with youth, they are working to achieve the same goal as preventionists. In such relationships, artists are working to provide excitement, challenge and opportunities for personal growth. In these kinds of relationships, artists and preventionists are actually "speaking the same language."

Risk-taking is not a new concept in the creative arts. In fact, most artists would probably agree that, by virtue of their being artists, they take risks all the time. Experimentation with unusual paint combinations or unusual combinations of movements in dance are examples of artists taking risks. However, the idea of risk-taking in the context of prevention with vulnerable youth goes much beyond the familiar territory of the artist and the preventionist. Risk taking in prevention goes to the heart of the issue of the need to look at the world, through the eyes and understanding of the youth, in a different way in order to make the world a better place.

Imagine the Difference.

If artists can begin to understand the role and value of their work for resiliency-building in prevention, and prevention experts can begin to understand the role and value of the creative arts in prevention, then they can both begin to **Imagine the Difference** they

can make working together as partners to prevent alcohol and other drug abuse among youth. The task of substance abuse prevention is bigger than either the artist or the preventionist, but becomes more manageable when both can learn effective ways to pool their energies and resources to work together.

A national conference to **Imagine the Difference** will help to inspire a movement toward the integration of creative arts into all aspects of substance abuse prevention. The importance of such a conference is in the opportunities it will offer for artists and prevention experts to come together in a supportive forum to explore areas of their common interests. It will provide a mechanism for each to begin to establish collaborative and cooperative relationships around an issue of such overwhelming importance as the prevention of alcohol and other drug abuse among youth. It will provide an opportunity to forge a new kind of partnership; a partnership that will serve as a model in which the unique perspectives of artists and preventionists will be combined to foster a greater role for creative arts strategies in prevention.

Perhaps, most importantly, the conference will be only the first step in a process for demystifying the creative arts and the creative process. Robert Alexander teaches us that "**everyone** is an artist." It is not necessary for prevention experts to hire artists as "consultants" in order to incorporate the arts into their prevention efforts. They need only to tap into their own creativity; to expand their own horizons; to be willing to look at

their own world in a different way. Imagine the Difference this can make for youth.

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